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OF THE CHINESE IN AMERICA**

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STEWART CULIN

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THE Papers of this Series, prepared by Professors and others connected with the University of Pennsylvania, will take the form of Monographs on the subjects of Philology, Literature, and Archæology, whereof about 200 or 250 pages will form a volume.

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Each author assumes the responsibility of his own contribution.



KWAN TÍ, THE GOD OF WAR

FROM A CHINESE PICTURE IN THE ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

THE GAMBLING GAMES OF THE CHINESE IN AMERICA.¹

The best known and most popular gambling games among the Chinese laborers in America are *fán lán* and *pák kòp piú*.

Fán lán is a game usually played upon a mat-covered table, with a quantity of Chinese coins or other small objects which are covered with a cup. The players guess what remainder will be left when the pile is divided by four, and bet upon the result. The name means "repeatedly spreading out," and refers to the manner in which the coins or other objects are spread out upon the table.²

It is usually conducted by a company of several persons, and is almost invariably played in a room on the ground floor, or in a cellar or basement. A white paper tablet with the name of the company is usually pasted without the door, with a similar label bearing the legend *yat yé hoi p'í*, which announces that the game is open day and night. In San Francisco, a man frequently stands in the doorway and invites passers-by to play, crying *mái lán á fát ts'oi lá!* Buy *fán lán* and make money!

In New York and Philadelphia, a sentinel is invariably stationed within the door, to keep out intruders and give warning of danger while the game is in progress.³

The gambling rooms are simply furnished, and have bare walls, except for a few texts on white paper tablets, or the rules of the game, which are sometimes written upon white paper and suspended on a board. There is a table about four feet

¹ Read in part before the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society, New York, January 26th, 1888.

² The writer is indebted to Herbert A. Giles, Esq., H. B. M. Consul, Amoy, China, for suggestions with reference to the etymology of *fán lán*, and the terms used to designate the different ways of laying the wagers.

³ This custom gives the not altogether incorrect impression to a visitor that each house is in a state of siege.

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high, covered with Canton matting, alongside of which is usually a railed space containing a high chair for the cashier. Around are a few wooden stools upon which the players may stand. In the centre of the table is a square called the *t'án ching* or "spreading out square," which consists either of a piece of tin with its four sides marked from right to left with the numerals from "one" to "four," or, as is more common here, of an unnumbered diagram, outlined in ink, upon the mat. This is usually about eighteen inches square.

Two men are required to run the game. One of them, called the *t'án kún* or "ruler of the spreading out," stands by

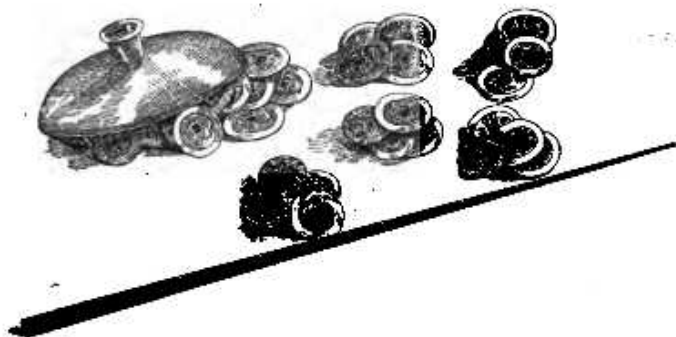


FIG. 1.

the side of the table which corresponds with the "one" side of the tablet, while the other, called the *ho kún*, whose office is that of clerk and cashier, sits on his left.

The *t'án kún* takes a handful of bright brass "cash" from a pile before him and covers them with a shallow brass cup about three and one-half inches in diameter, called the *t'án k'oi* or "spreading out cover."¹ The players lay their wagers on or beside the numbers they select on the plate, and the *t'án kún* raises the cover and carefully counts off the "cash" in fours, one at a time, not touching them with his hands, but using a tapering rod of black wood about eighteen inches in length, called the *t'án pong*, or "spreading out rod," for the purpose.

¹ The objects used in the games described in this paper have been deposited by the writer in the Museum of Archaeology of the University of Pennsylvania.

If there is a remainder of one, after he has removed as many fours as possible, "one" is said to be "opened"; if two or three remain, "two" or "three" is "opened," or if the pile has contained an even number of fours and there is no remainder, the "four" is "opened." The operation is conducted in silence, and when the result is apparent, the *tán kún* mechanically replaces the separated "cash" into the large pile and takes another handful from it, which he covers as before.

There are several ways in which a player may lay his stakes upon the table:

First, *mái fán*, or *tán fán*, "buying a single number." The player lays his stakes in front of the number he desires to bet on, with a narrow red card, called a *kau li*, "dog's tongue," beneath them. If the number played on is "opened" the cashier pays the player four times the sum wagered, but if one of the other numbers is opened the player loses.

Second, *mái ching tau*, "buying the front of the square," also called *mái hong*, "buying a row." The player lays his money in front of a number as before, but without the red card. In this case he receives his wager back if either of the side numbers is "opened;" gets double, if the number played on is opened, and loses if the opposite number is played.

Third, *mái kòk*, "buying the corner." The player lays on a corner of the square. He is paid double if one of the contiguous numbers is "opened," but loses if either of the others is "opened."

Fourth, *mái níp*, "buying a twist." The player lays his money near the end of the side, instead of at the centre, with a red card on top. If the number played on is "opened" the player receives twice the amount, or if the number on the adjacent side is "opened" he gets it back; but if one of the other sides is opened, he loses.

The cashier pays the winnings from a money-box beside him, after deducting a percentage, which alone constitutes the company's profit, as no matter in which way a player lays his money, the chances are precisely equal between him and the company. No charge is usually made on winnings of small amount.

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A player may put his money directly on the table, or he may use counters or chips instead, a supply of which, of different denominations, is usually heaped within the square. These counters consist of *ts'in tse'*, or Chinese "cash," which represent ten cents; *pák chü*, "white pearls," representing \$1; *hak chü*, "black pearls," \$5; chessmen, \$10, and dominoes¹, \$50. Other values are sometimes assigned to them. When counters are used, two red cards instead of one are placed beneath them, in the case of the first wager, *mái fán*, and one red card in the second, *mái ching t'au*, and the third, *mái kok*.

When counters are used, the player frequently deposits a bank note or his purse with the cashier, who places a Chinese playing card of the kind called *ts'èung kwan p'ai* beside it, to identify it, and hands a corresponding card to the player. This card the player sometimes puts upon the table with the counters representing his stakes, where it takes the place of one of the red cards. Then when a player loses and continues playing, the cashier places the counters he has lost on the *ts'èung kwan p'ai* that indicates his money; but if the winnings are in a player's favor, he puts one of the red cards under the player's marker, and deposits on it the counters that represent his winnings, after deducting the company's commission. The latter is usually about seven per cent.

A player is not ordinarily permitted to stake a counter representing a sum larger than that he has deposited with the cashier, although the games are sometimes conducted on credit and settlements made the next day. The companies reserve the right to decline any wager and close the game at any time.

The games are opened at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and at 8 in the evening, and often at 11 in the morning on Sundays and holidays. The company always opens the game, one of its members acting as *t'án kún*.

The partners sometimes take turns in keeping game, and receive twenty-five or fifty cents from the common fund each time, or one of them may be appointed to act as keeper, and then receives a salary of about twenty-five dollars per month.

¹These dominoes are frequently covered with paper upon which their accredited value is written.

Each member of a company who keeps game has a book in which he records the profits and losses while he is acting as keeper.

After the game has continued for about half an hour, or sooner, if the company has lost money, a settlement is made with the players, and any of them are permitted to take the table and run it for their own profit, upon paying a small rental to the company and a fee to the cashier for his services.

The *ho kún*, or cashier, receives a salary of about twenty-five dollars a month, and usually has a small interest in the company.

Very little capital is required by the *fán t'án* companies. The members usually contribute from fifty to two hundred dollars together, and this is sufficient unless the losses are large. The gambling cellars are usually owned by people interested in the stores, by whom they are rented to the companies at from ten dollars and upwards per month, but sometimes in consideration of a share of the profits of the tables. There are eight companies in Philadelphia and between thirty and forty in New York, several companies often using the same table alternately. The profits of the smaller companies in Philadelphia are said to average about five dollars per day, but this amount is often much exceeded.

The coins used in playing *fán t'án* are those of the present dynasty, such as are now current in China, and are imported expressly for gambling purposes in large quantities. Only perfect pieces, and preferably those of the same mintage, are selected, and these are cleaned with vinegar and afterward polished by being shaken with damp sawdust in a cotton bag. Those of the Kanghí period (A. D. 1661 to 1722), and of the Kienlung period (A. D. 1735 to 1796), which constitute a large part of the present circulation in China, are generally used, but pieces representing all the emperors of the Manchu dynasty, except the present ruler, may be found upon these strings of cash, and a collection embracing the issues of many of the provincial mints can be formed from them without much difficulty. Some of the strings of "cash" of the periods already referred to, appear to be quite uncirculated, and are probably